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SUBJECT: CESFRONT - A PERSPECTIVE FROM PEDERNALES

REF: 2007 SANTO DOMINGO 2722

¶1. PolOff met with source who is a U.S. citizen currently residing in Pedernales, a border town in the south of the country, doing local development work. Source, in the course of her duties, has regular contact with NGOs, local community leaders, and residents, including Dominicans, Haitians and Dominico-Haitians. Source has been in the country for a year and six months. During the meeting source gave PolOff her candid perspective on life in Pedernales regarding the Dominican Specialized Border Security Corps (CESFRONT).

¶2. According to source, prior to the deployment of CESFRONT, cross-border trade and traffic between Anse-a-Pitre, Haiti and Pedernales, Dominican Republic were more free-flowing and less regulated. Source described the trade as consisting of residents of Anse-a-Pitre buying fish, coffee, and other agricultural products, and providing services such as domestic help and the Dominicans buying American rice, beans, fruit and vegetables, as well as used clothing. Consistent with the deployment of CESFRONT in Dajabon, a border town in the north of the country, CESFRONT halted daily traffic including on market days in Pedernales (Reftel). CESFRONT, at the request of Dominican producers of rice and other agricultural products, checked goods from Haiti and halted contraband such as American rice. This resulted in the increase of the price of American rice and consequently increased smuggling. The Haitians protested the closure for about five market days, about two to three weeks. Source stated CESFRONT eventually eased restrictions, now allowing traffic on market days, though entry of Haitian vendors into the DR remains limited and market day in Anse-a-Pitre is still defunct.

¶3. Though source noted that CESFRONT's presence in Pedernales seems less widely felt and less visible the last few months than when they were first initially deployed, MilOff highlighted that there are more CESFRONT officials and attributed this perception to residents having accepted the role of CESFRONT and perceived their presence as less intrusive. CESFRONT manages the border crossing point everyday and one road checkpoint on market days while the army manages twelve road checkpoints on the way to the capital of the country. Source described these checkpoints as points where the military "look for bribes from any vulnerable suspects." Illegal entrants can pay up to USD 120 dollars (RD 4,000 pesos) in bribes to reach the interior. Even legal entrants often have to pay bribes to stop being harassed. Source stated that her contacts expressed

reservations in crossing the border, as CESFRONT now implements more effective border control, i.e. those without proper documentation are not able to cross as easily.

¶4. CESFRONT continues to engage in regular round-ups of suspected Haitians in Pedernales. Prior to CESFRONT's deployment in September 2007, source did not observe these round-ups occur. Source had contact with a local Haitian women's group, who expressed their fear of going out of their homes to buy food, running their errands, or bringing their children to school, for fear of being rounded-up and deported. They also expressed similar fear of deportation for their husbands or partners, who often were out working in construction in Pedernales or other areas of the country. Source admitted the individuals in this group did not have legal permission to stay and that the individuals CESFRONT rounded up were usually based on "profiles" usually nabbing darker-skinned individuals or persons who "looked" Haitian e.g. an elderly woman carrying fruit basket on head.

¶5. Source estimates fifteen to twenty percent of Pedernales's population at any given time are Haitians. About half of them use Pedernales as a "stepping stone" to other parts of the country. Those who manage a way to pay off someone to take them to the interior usually end up in urban areas to work in construction or domestic work or in other agricultural areas.

¶6. Source mentioned that in the last three months, she has noticed the border functioning normally with no increased visible traffic due to food shortages in Haiti. Market day has been taking place regularly, however, still only on the

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Dominican side. In a separate meeting, Kelvin Jimenez, a representative from the Jesuit Refugee Services, an NGO that advocates for Haitian migrants, told PolOff that though more Haitians may come over to Dajabon to buy food, contrary to media accounts, there is not an "avalanche" of Haitians crossing the border. He attributed the media exaggeration to pandering and fear-mongering by politicians.

¶7. Source has not seen any progress in regards to providing temporary border crossing cards for day laborers, domestic help, street merchants, and others who need to cross the border on a daily basis. Upon deployment of CESFRONT, the GODR explored the idea of issuing a special ID (carnet) to facilitate the legitimate daily crossing of certain individuals (Reftel).

¶8. Comment: Since its deployment in September 2007, CESFRONT has faced unique challenges in each of the four border-crossing points: Dajabon, Comendador, (Reftel) Jimani, and Pedernales. They have also faced similar issues such as how to regulate the movement of goods and people without adversely affecting trade. Other issues remain, however, including repatriation and border crossing cards. To date, CESFRONT has managed to exert some control in Pedernales, as well as in the other border crossing points where little existed before. End Comment.

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